

KOREAN PERIODIC MARKETS: SOME CONCEPTUALIZATIONS AND OBSERVATIONS

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I. Introduction

In the rural countryside of South Korea much commercial exchange takes place through the institution of the periodic market which may be visualized from different perspectives as a traveling market, a scheduled meeting of peddlars and the social event of the week. Certain places exist as market sites with a market meeting taking place at regular one day intervals. Thus, a market may meet according to one of five schedules—on those calendar days ending in the digits 1 and 6, 2 and 7, 3 and 8, 4 and 9 and 5 and 0. In 1975 there were 1,551 such markets and 1,415 in 1978 (Kim, 1980a, p. 162). In the frenetic rush to modernize in the last two decades much has been made of the passing of old Korea and its institutions. It should be of no small interest and some potential importance to take note of those phenomena which have persisted in the face of such rapid change and the *o-il-jang* or five-day market is a good case in point. The South Korean economy has developed to the point that the conditions assumed to necessitate periodic marketing (e.g. low level of capitalization, low wage level and rudimentary transport structure) are being eliminated. Periodic markets nevertheless remain, and a satisfactory explanation of this seeming anomaly has been lacking.

A scholarly literature exists on periodic markets and the subject seems to have become quite topical since 1970 drawing contributions from anthropology and sociology as well as geography. There are a number of working hypotheses and a body of tentative theory yet, here too, many unanswered questions remain.

Two basic attitudes toward periodic markets displayed in the literature are of interest. Many writers view them as marginal economic institutions (Webber and Symanski, 1973). The periodic market is seen as a reasonable response to the present backward situation but its eventual disappearance is expected. Another view of the periodic market considers it to be, in essence, a quaint local custom inherited from a time past. The market is said to

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endure through the weight of custom and the fact that the local people enjoy the exchange of gossip and hearty price-haggling which accompany a trip to market (Khuri, 1968; Tinkler, 1973, 121). While most studies recognize both aspects of the markets, it is common for a scholarly article to treat periodic markets as either an economic or sociocultural phenomena—but rarely as an integrated socioeconomic activity.

II. Literature Review

At this point I intend to describe the relative position of the periodic market as it appears in Korea among other similar phenomena in the world by considering the major points in the periodic literature and highlighting aspects of similarity and dissimilarity while indicating some possible approaches of inquiry.

A major debate exists over the nature of the spatio-temporal synchronization of market meeting schedules, the manner in which periodic market meetings are coordinated over time and space (Smith, 1971). In the research to date it has not been possible to adequately assess whether existing market meeting schedules are of more benefit to trader prosperity or consumer utility. Stated in more theoretical terms, the question is whether the spatial structure of a given periodic market system may be best explained by the spatial theory of the firm—with the focus on the itinerant trader and attempting to determine whether travel and transport costs are minimized—or by central place theory—with the focus on the rural household and attempting to determine whether consumer utility (i.e. access to goods and services) is maximized. This question is further confounded by the fact that most traders in periodic market systems apparently return to home base after each market meeting. Preliminary research indicates that this is the predominant pattern in Korea also. This fact would lessen the relevance of a trader-centered analysis and is presumably at play in many of the findings which point toward the acceptance of a consumer-centered interpretation (Smith, forthcoming, II, 8–9). In addition, many inquiries along this line do not take sufficient note of the differences between individual markets in terms of hierarchical level, size, commodity mix, etc. Clearly, an approach comparing markets within a similar class is in order and Carol Smith (1974, 185) has suggested commodity mix as a useful class marker. In his review of the literature, Robert H. T. Smith lists the various approaches used in establishing such market classes (forthcoming, II, 16–25).

Somewhat related to this question of whether the trader or consumer is the prime beneficiary of the spatio-temporal pattern of market meetings is the question of whether significant market subsystems exist within a given periodic market system. That is, whether there may exist in certain locales a group of markets which appear to be linked together either through

commodity flows, visitation by essentially the same group of traders or more or less uniform patronage over the long run by the local populace. This question has been expressed in the literature as the search for "market rings" and it is tempting to gaze upon a location map giving the market meeting dates and to perceive the existence of market subsystems. Such a cursory examination of the marketing map contained in Kim (1977) offers the tempting suggestion that a number of five-day circuits or five market subsystems exist in the Korean case. It also suggests that in many cases these subsystems may be set up to facilitate trader transit of the markets in a basically circuitous manner.

As in the majority of cases these market meeting schedules have remained fixed since the founding of the market, this market meeting map represents to a degree the historical marketing landscape of rural Korea. Although no doubt affected over the years by the obviation of market places and new market "births", the present pattern may suggest that in earlier times markets were established with the minimization of transport costs in mind due perhaps to the limitations imposed by a rudimentary transport infrastructure or to influence wielded by traders in such decisions or both. Given the marked improvement in the transport situation, this inherited pattern of market meetings may be less than necessary at present, presenting perhaps an opportunity to reorganize the pattern with little hindrance to trader activity but possibly increased consumer utility or efficacy in the planning of rural centers in modern Korea.

Unfortunately the topic of market subsystems appears to be a moot one with little clarification. As Smith rightly points out (forthcoming, I, 11), the debate has seemingly ignored the relevance of the perceptions and behavior of the market participants themselves, and this may be a source of the present lack of success in discovering "market rings".

It would appear that the common view that periodic markets will die out with economic development is of little aid in thoroughly understanding the phenomenon. Although many authors assume that the markets are performing marginal and redundant roles in the national economy, the fact that they yet exist casts serious doubt on this interpretation. The persistence of the institution implies some non-redundant role which is not as yet adequately understood. In order to explain such persistence, recourse to the sociocultural role of the markets in the local rural society is, no doubt, in order. The anthropological literature offers models which allow a specification and analysis of this role (Skinner, 1964-65; Uchendu, 1976;). It has been suggested that within the context of a market meeting a consumer may form important alliances within his peer group, secure important information on the local market situation, obtain knowledge with which future life decisions of marriage, migration and career choice may be made; in sum, the periodic market may play a crucial

integrative role in the local social structure. From the trader's point of view, meeting at market is an occasion to obtain information concerning local surplus produce, and, depending upon his business acumen and social skills, to seek a monopoly on local trade.

In connection with this sociocultural role of the market, a range of questions exist concerning different aspects of market participant behavior and certain characteristics of the market participants themselves. Chief among the latter are sex, class and ethnicity (Smith, forthcoming, II, 6). One might also add other common background variables of age, religion and occupation as well as, in the case of a family-oriented society such as Korea, a host of variables derived from information on family history and structure. From his vantage point, Smith explains that although the demands of itinerant trade may involve movement over considerable space, this seems to have little differential effect on males or females (forthcoming, II, 8). This situation seems to prevail in low level markets in Korea where one tends to see a mix of both sexes among the traders. One wonders if this situation prevails in higher level markets where assumedly larger scale trade would make demands for greater capital and more distant travel between markets. In an allegedly male-dominated society one would expect females to have greater difficulty meeting these demands, resulting in an increasingly male-dominated trader population as one moves up the national hierarchy of periodic markets.

Ethnicity seems to be of muted relevance in Korea where the major fissures in the society tend to occur along regional lines; thus, one may expect a given market to be served primarily or almost exclusively by traders native to the local region. An interesting exercise would be to identify individual markets within areas of regional overlap and observe the marketing patterns. What are the native regions of traders serving the market(s)? In the likely event that more than one region is represented among the traders, are the different regional groups of traders characterized by certain lines of goods and/or scales of trade? Is there any pattern to the kind of consumers that each trader group attracts in the local market(s)?

III. Korea in the Literature

Now it is in order to turn to that literature which treats specifically the Korean case. The English language literature on Korean markets consists of an early article by Stine (1962), a later article by Lee (1975), a dissertation by Park (1977), a study by Kim (1980a) and an article by Park (1981). In his article which is a classic in the periodic market literature and often cited, Stine first cast the subject of periodic markets within the framework of central place theory of Christaller (1966). Using information on Korean market meeting schedules as an illustration, his article is a useful conceptualization

of periodic markets but does not constitute a case study for Korea. In her article, Lee (1975) uses the framework of central place to analyze the growth and distribution of periodic markets in Korea during this century. Her special interest is the ordering principle at play in determining the spatial structure of the markets. She finds upon analysis that the marketing principle of Christaller (i.e.— $K = 3$) is at play in the Nakdong river basin and in the area of the northern Honam plain around Nonsan, but that elsewhere the distribution pattern appears irregular. Her surmise is that although some 1,073 markets abounded in the 1960s, the periodic “. . . market is bound to disappear. . .” (1975, 23–24). In her dissertation Ms. Park focuses on Dangjin, a relatively large, developed market in ch’ungnam province which appeared as of 1975 (Kim, 1977) to be on the second level of the national periodic market hierarchy. She considers the economic role of the market in supporting development with the view that the existence of periodic markets may not necessarily inhibit development. And the latest work by Kim (1980a) considers changes in the structure and functions of these markets with some prescriptive measures suggested as improvements.

IV. Observations on Market Growth

G. W. Skinner (1964–65) has discussed the growth in numbers of periodic markets in China. His argument, simply stated, is that the number of markets may grow due to an increased degree of commercialization of the rural economy or through a straightforward increase in population in the area. Skinner characterized these hypothesized bases of market growth as “modern” and “traditional” respectively.

I propose to attempt some further specification of this growth process by means of a number of scenarios. These scenarios will depict the growth of a market system while at the same time specific points of relevance for the Korean case will be highlighted.

Eighmy (1972, 299) has described three essential trading roles—and by implication a hierarchical correlation—that periodic markets may play: local exchange, internal trade and market exchange. It is within this framework that my scenarios will be constructed.

As an institution of local exchange the periodic market would exist in the “isolated state” of von Thunen (Hall, 1966) in which trade is essentially two-way and horizontal in nature between the urban and rural sectors. The former exchanges light manufactures and services in return for basic agricultural commodities. As an institution of internal trade the most likely setting would be a landscape of spatial interaction as described by Ullman (1956). In such a setting the periodic markets perform the role of linking points of surplus and deficit for a given good. With levels of demand and supply present in two given centers together with the capability

to transport the desired commodities from the one point to the other, a trade flow between these points should develop. Assuming food supply from the immediate environs à la von Thünen, the most likely commodities in this exchange would be local specialty products rather than basic agricultural goods. Finally, as an institution of market exchange, the periodic market may be seen as a node in a multi-leveled hierarchical exchange system in which trade is predominately vertical. The common view of such a system is that of agricultural commodities flowing upward to larger scale centers of demand and urban goods and services in return flowing downward to the smaller scale centers.

Dependant upon which role or roles the periodic market plays in trade, a number of ramifications exist. Thus, a local exchange market would be most characteristic of a low order center in a multi-leveled national system of trade centers. Its scope of operation would be limited to the immediate vicinity with much of the activity being horizontal trade—farm produce exchanged for items not manufactured on the farm itself. At this level the friction of distance and time constraints especially on consumer activity are high. Such conditions would tend to strengthen any monopolistic tendencies among traders. One might expect the total number of traders to be low with the number of itinerant traders larger than the number of locally resident merchants. This may be so due to the general subsistence level of the agricultural landscape which entails a low level of demand. In fact, rather than a great number of full-time sedentary traders at the market center, this might be a likely setting in which to witness the appearance of part-time mobile marketers as suggested by Hay (1971) in his criticism of Stine's argument.

The internal trade type of market would also have a number of similar ramifications. The bulk of centers engaged in this level of trade would tend to be located in a middle rung position on the national market center hierarchy. The scope of operation would be long-distance trade at the regional level. As this landscape is characterized by more trade center options than the von Thünen landscape, it would appear to be less prone to monopoly. However, as there are supply-demand requirements between the trade centers, there is less than complete freedom in choosing trading partners. Thus, a limiting condition to the development of free competition in the trading process is present together with a corresponding tendency for the growth of oligopoly in which a certain number of traders/trader groups from each center become predominant in the interregional trade.

This trade is in its nature a two-way exchange between distant points, a predominantly horizontal exchange over longer distances than the local exchange markets. The friction of distance in this case will be lower with a corresponding lowered level of time constraints on activity. This may be so either due to an improved transport network or the higher levels of

demand involved. At this scale of activity it may be expected that a great number of itinerant traders may be present to facilitate this long distance trade.

It is commonly assumed that with increased development in a given area there will eventually appear a multi-leveled, hierarchical system of market centers. Although the consummate manifestation of this process would be the fixed trade sites of the central place model, it is reasonable to expect that with continued development and interlinkage of the economy a collection of mobile trade sites may appear and also assume a hierarchical pattern. In such a case the market sites would be arranged in a manner allowing the assumedly beneficial effects of competition to come to the fore. Thus, the rural market participant has a relatively proximate lower order center while at the same time travel distance is minimized to higher order centers. In this manner the prospects for the merchant gleanng an amount of excess profits due to spatial monopoly are limited. This scenario may be identified more so with the upper levels of the national periodic market hierarchy. The resultant landscape would be characterized by and have as a precondition a relatively low friction of distance due to efficient transport; the trade activity would be truly national in scope, perhaps even international.

The above scenario descriptions will suffice to describe the role of the periodic markets in a given area at a certain point in time. It is now in order to offer some observations of causative agents or processes which may be at play in fomenting change within the system over time. As indicated earlier, the common assumption in the field is to equate the local trade role of the markets with a low level of development in the space economy, most characteristic of either a modern underdeveloped area or the historical landscape of some modern developed areas. The following agents of dynamism may work toward either "progress" or "retrogression" of the periodic market landscape. These agents are by no means the only possibilities but are rather the most tractable for presentation and elucidation within the present context.

The concept of "economic base" has been a major focus within economic geography. Briefly, the productive activity of a given settlement may be divided into two general categories, those activities which bring revenue in from without-termed the "export" or "city-building" activities, and those activities which are performed by and for the members of the settlement themselves-termed the "local" or "city-enabling" activities. The former group of activities are said to constitute the economic base of the settlement and are considered to be the "basic" activities while the latter are considered to be "non-basic" (Tiebout, 1962; Richardson, 1973). And it is of use to view the occasion of a periodic market meeting in this framework. Thus, just as tourists flocking to a foreign land represent an export earning for that foreign land, so will the drawing of customers from the immediate environs and more distant hinterland for market day

represent an opportunity for the enrichment of the economic base of the settlement. Of course, money transferred in transactions with visiting traders constitutes an outflow of funds but the increased level of sales activity among local resident merchants results in an enrichment of the economic base of the settlement.

Shifting the focus slightly, it may be seen that both the fortunes of the periodic market meeting at the site and the attendant accrual to the local economic base on market day will be heavily dependant upon the ability of consumers attending the market from outside the settlement to secure adequate levels of income. As much of the Korean rural populace is engaged in agriculture, it follows that while increased specialization in agricultural production entails a lowered level of self-sufficiency and increased participation in commercial exchange, increased specialization in crops with a favorable market situation (i.e.—stable prices at high levels) may be conducive to market growth. Thus, one may expect economic base in this sense to be a significant factor in the development of periodic markets located in areas of major crop specialization and output.

An area such as Euseong county in North Kyeongsang Province might be a good example of such a case as it was recently identified as the second largest region in the production of garlic and fifth largest region in the production of apples in the nation (Kim, 1980b, Chart V-8).

A second prospective agent for dynamism in this system of market places is the role of transport improvement. In a formulation quite favored by geographers, the relative degree to which distance represents a barrier will have ramifications for the growth or stagnation of the periodic market structure. Briefly, the improvement of the transport infrastructure will lower the cost of overcoming distance and make it easier for the market trader and, likewise, the consumer to traverse greater distances to market. Of many possible outcomes the most probable ultimate result is that the more advantageously positioned market place(s) in the newly transformed space economy would flourish as they may now attract more customers from greater distances. Many of the, heretofore, multitudenous markets will be obviated and the improvement in transport development may have the dual effect of lowering the absolute number of markets on any or all hierarchical levels while allowing a fraction of the previous number to maintain their existence and perhaps even advance in the national periodic market hierarchy. A marked decline in the transport infrastructure brought about, for example, by natural disasters affecting the extant road system or a new and competing transport route (or node) circumventing the present transport arteries may very well result in a decrease in the number and even level of markets in the area. An example exists in the Korean case of the market located in Kobu, North Cholla Province which ceased to function when the local transport situation was upgraded, thus allowing local market patrons to travel to other markets in the area at greater ease.

It is also interesting to note that in this case the dirt country road was not improved. Rather a greater number of buses were operated over the road. Thus, the crucial variable appears to be linkage which is normally increased with road improvement but can, as in this case, occur through the mere institution of more frequent transport services.

Associated with the level of overall economic growth in an area, the population will necessarily undergo an improvement in its technological expertise and some alteration in the manner in which the potential inherent in the immediate physical environment is assessed for human use. It may very well come to pass (as it has in the past) that certain sites previously considered to be of little value to man may now, given altered views on the state of resources and an improved technology, become of value as sites for industrial production. For our inquiry this will have the effect of drawing to a site a labor force which through its earnings and disposable income represents a sizeable increase in the market potential at that point. Where no market existed before, one may now be established; where a low level market previously existed, a higher level market may develop. In fact, given a marked increase in the market potential at a point, a fixed agglomeration of merchant shops may exist in a relatively short space of time where no merchant activity existed before. Examples exist in the Korean case of a now defunct market which was located in a gold mining village during its heyday (Shijang-ri, Ipjang-myeon, Ch'eonweon-gun, Ch'ungnam-do), of a market which was founded when the Korean court was forced to flee the capital and the Manchu invasion and settled with its retainers in a rural area (Shingjang-ri, Tongbu-myeon, Kwangju-gun, Kyeonggi-do) and a market which owes its founding to the fortunate siting of a Korean army training base in the area (Shinch'on-ri, Yeonmu-eup, Nonsan-gun, Ch'ungnam-do).

Another and similar example may be taken from the area of recreational activity. Change in the value of a site for leisurely repose which may come about especially in a period of cultural change or colonization may also result in the drawing of an increased market demand to a given site. In a manner similar to the industrial example above, this will have ramifications for the feasibility of trade at that site. It should be pointed out that the industrial example and recreational example cited here will also have multi-stage reverberations throughout the space economy (especially the larger the market captured by the new market sites) which may very well result in an alteration of the relative location of the market sites in the immediate region, if not the whole space economy. It should be also pointed out that the latter recreational example is also of a more evanescent, temporal nature. It may serve as a leisure spot—and therefore a center of trade—only at certain times of the year. In the Korean case, markets situated in the summer resort areas along the south and west coasts may be local exemplars of such a pattern.

II. CONCLUSION

As indicated in the introduction, Korea appears to be an interesting context within which to study the periodic market phenomenon. As late as 1975 no less than 44.7 percent of the markets were reported to be growing with another 38.6 percent maintaining a stable level of activity and 16.8 percent thought to be on the decline (Kim, 1977, 225). The seeming paradox of the persistence of a traditional market structure within the context of rapid economic development presents itself as an interesting topic for study.

As we have seen the question of the growth of these markets is a complex one with many theoretical ramifications and varied empirical commitments as evidenced in the scenarios. In the Korean case, as in many others, it would be of aid to come to some understanding of the relative roles played by economic and sociocultural factors in motivating the consuming public to come to market. No doubt there is a viable economic need being met. But, especially in a society such as that of Korea which prides itself on its respect for the ways of the past, may there not be a degree of sociocultural drag on the impulse toward rationalization of the individual markets and the market system in general? To what degree, *ceteris paribus*, does farmer Kim elect to go to market to enjoy the company of friends and at least semi-urban amenities as opposed to distance minimization and utility maximization? The economic rationale behind itinerant trader visitation schedules must be uncovered to reach a finer understanding or a more robust formulation of the question of for whom the spatio-temporal pattern of market meetings is most propitious. Or, perhaps more likely, it may allow us to focus on the relative degrees to which it benefits *both* the trader and the consumer. As suggested above, the crucial step needed to adequately address this and other theoretical and empirical questions is a sustained effort to collect and analyze data on market participant behavior. Which types of consumers and tradents to to which market(s), with what frequency, for what purposes? At present research is being conducted which may be able to bring to light some of the major patterns of market participant behavior in low-level periodic markets in Korea. On the macro-level, it will be useful to observe also the spatial location of markets on the various hierarchical levels, both in nationwide as well as appropriate regional contexts. Preliminary research for this task has been done and a draft is in preparation.

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